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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Unraveling Trauma and Heterotopic Spaces in Michael Ondaatje's "Anil's Ghost": A Postcolonial Exploration

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| ABSTRACT

The present paper explores Michael Ondaatje's novel "Anil's Ghost" through the lens of trauma theory, postcolonialism, and the concept of heterotopic spaces. As space studies examine migration, displacement, and exile, which are inherently linked to traumatic experiences, the investigation illuminates the intricate connection between heterotopic spaces and encounters with trauma, providing a valuable understanding of their interdependence. Michael Ondaatje, the acclaimed author of "Anil's Ghost", has drawn upon his own traumatic experiences of displacement and emigration in the novel. Therefore, the purpose of the research paper is to analyze how changes in space shape traumatic experiences. Spaces are integral to one's sense of place and identity, and traumatic events might disrupt this connection, leading to a profound loss of identity or a struggle to reconcile personal identity with changed or disrupted spaces. Studying the connections between trauma and space reveals a better understanding of how environments and spatial contexts impact the occurrence, perception, and recovery from traumatic events. The research contextualizes Foucault's concept of heterotopia within postcolonial distinctions in time and space, emphasizing its relevance in understanding the novel's narrative. It highlights the complexity of trauma and the challenge of reconciling historical narratives within these spaces. Employing a multidimensional methodology integrating cultural studies, trauma theory, and literary analysis, results uncover the complexities of trauma within postcolonial spaces, notably Sri Lanka, showcasing the profound impact of historical conflicts and Western interventions. Ultimately, the research concludes by recognizing the intertwined nature of trauma, history, and identity within physical and metaphorical spaces. It acknowledges the evolution of characters' identities like Anil Tissera, who navigate their personal traumas and their nation's scars, seeking a path forward while acknowledging the weight of history. In summary, the manuscript contributes to a deeper understanding of how "Anil's Ghost" navigates the complexities of trauma, identity, and history, shedding light on the relationships between individuals, society, and historical narratives in postcolonial contexts.

| KEYWORDS

Michael Ondaatje, heterotopia, trauma, history, identity, postcolonialism.

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### 1. Introduction

Literary trauma theory thoroughly examines how trauma is portrayed, understood, and processed in literature. It analyzes the ways authors convey traumatic experiences and explores their effects on characters and narratives. This approach goes beyond merely presenting traumatic events; it also investigates how literature shapes readers' comprehension of trauma, memory, and the healing process. In his novel "Anil's Ghost" (2000), Michael Ondaatje, a famous and influential contemporary Canadian writer, examines the multifaceted aspects of trauma, memory, identity, and history that accompany displacement and migration. At the age of 11, M. Ondaatje moved to England, leaving behind his homeland and the familiar landscapes of Sri Lanka. His experiences of displacement, migration, and navigating multiple cultural identities might be considered a form of personal trauma. M. Ondaatje's main character, Anil Tissera, reflects the author's interests and concerns in exploring trauma, identity, and the influence of Western

stories within the narrative. Anil's struggle to comprehend and reconcile with local trauma while being shaped by Western education and scientific perspectives resonates within Ondaatje's own challenges in negotiating a place within a constantly evolving world. Anil's quest for meaning amidst shifting landscapes mirrors Ondaatje's own exploration of identity and belonging across different cultural spaces.

Anil's journey through the labyrinth of her identity and trauma is complexly woven into her encounters with the term "amygdala". As she delves deeper into her profession as a forensic anthropologist, the word takes on multifaceted significance, transcending its mere anatomical definition. Midway through the narrative, when she asks her professor about its meaning, he briefly explains that the term refers to a particular area in the brain, described as "the dark aspect of the brain... a repository for frightening memories" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 80). This scene anticipates the key motifs in Michael Ondaatje's intricate and deeply moving novel "Anil's Ghost," encompassing themes such as the complexities of memory and trauma, the search for identity amidst displacement and dislocation, the blending of scientific pursuit with emotional introspection, and the interconnectedness of personal history with larger socio-political upheavals. The term "amygdala" serves as a means for Anil to explore not just the physical aspects of the bodies she studies but also to navigate the complex emotions and historical complexities that shape her own personal journey. Her initial resonance with the term, perceiving it as something "Sri Lankan" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 79-80), hints at a subconscious link between her professional pursuit and her roots. The amygdala becomes a metaphorical symbol of remembrance and connection to her past. Furthermore, the amygdala serves as a mediator for emotional responses to the traumatic events unfolding in the novel. Its repetitive invocation triggers memories, opening pathways to buried recollections and old echoes, slowly revealing the layers of Anil's identity and past trauma. Anil's determined efforts to find the amygdala during autopsies mirror her journey of seeking comprehension and reconciliation with her own distressing memories and unresolved emotional wounds.

Anil's identity, fragmented by displacement and the ravages of conflict, reflects in the fragmented nature of memory – disjointed, scattered, yet resonant with a deep emotional weight. Her persistent engagement with the amygdala becomes a ritualized interplay, navigating between facing the shadows of her history and embracing the scientific exploration of human anatomy. Moreover, her immersion in the physicality of her work, seeking out the "nerve bundle which houses fear" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 80), symbolizes her effort to analyze, separate, and ultimately come to terms with her own fears and painful encounters. In essence, Anil's exploration of the amygdala resonates with her search for a cohesive narrative that can encompass both the scientific realities she encounters in her profession and the profound, emotionally charged complexities of her own history. The term becomes a bridge between her professional endeavours and personal introspection, encapsulating the interconnectedness of memory, trauma, space and the quest for identity.

## 2. Literature review.

The emergence of literary trauma theory can be traced back to the late 20th century, gaining momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. However, its roots are interconnected with the development of trauma theory itself, which began to form in the aftermath of World War II, particularly in response to the Holocaust. The study of trauma in literature became more prominent as scholars started to explore how traumatic experiences were represented in literary texts. Cathy Caruth, a literary critic and scholar, in her influential work in the late 20th century, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, published in 1996, explains that "...literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed, at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (Caruth, 1996, p. 3). She further suggests that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). A prominent historian and critical theorist, Dominick LaCapra, identifies Cathy Caruth's approach to trauma as a shift toward a new focus on the literary within the study of trauma. This shift termed the "epistemological turn," suggests that literature surpasses the constraints of traditional theoretical discourse, offering a more expansive platform to explore and understand trauma. LaCapra explains: "Certain forms of literature or art, as well as the type of discourse or theory which emulates its object, may provide a more expansive space (in psychoanalytic terms, a relatively safe haven) for exploring modalities of responding to trauma, including the role of affect and the tendency to repeat traumatic events. At times, art departs from ordinary reality to produce surrealistic situations or radically playful openings that seem to be sublimely irrelevant to ordinary reality but may uncannily provide indirect commentary or insight into that reality" (LaCapra, 2001, p. 185-186). Caruth and LaCapra collectively emphasize the evocative nature of poetic expression, which has significantly enriched discussions on trauma. This expansion of literary theory beyond the boundaries of traditional psychoanalysis and neurobiology has introduced fresh perspectives on the complexities of traumatic experiences.

Theories of trauma and postcolonialism are rooted in the dynamic relationship between time and space, encompassing both tangible and psychological dimensions. Consequently, we draw on the insights of French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault regarding heterotopias (*Of Other Spaces* 1984) to explore the depths beyond the power dynamics of ethnocentrism prevalent in the developed world. Connecting trauma theory with the idea of heterotopic space in "Anil's Ghost" offers an intriguing perspective

on how trauma manifests in unconventional or distorted spaces, both physical and psychological. These spaces challenge conventional understandings of reality, offering a lens through which characters navigate the complexities of trauma, memory, and the search for meaning in a world marked by upheaval and dislocation.

Edward Said, Palestinian-American intellectual, scholar, and literary theorist, in his groundbreaking book "*Orientalism*," (2003), also asserts the need to reconsider history, providing the following argument, "*history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and rewritten*, so that "our" East, "our" Orient becomes "ours" to possess and direct" (Said, 2003, p. 13). Professor Kevin Hetherington, in his monograph "*The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*" (1997), underscores that the concept of heterotopia is most commonly associated with postmodernism (Hetherington, 1997, p. 41). In our view, given this perspective, the concept necessitates a distinct approach and application within the context of postcolonial trauma. Heterotopia aligns seamlessly with postcolonial critiques and research endeavours, as both fields concentrate on notions of otherness and social ordering.

The term "heterotopia" originates from Latin and literally means "a place of otherness" (Foucault, 1986, p. 22-27). According to Foucault, heterotopias are tangible locations that contrast with utopias and lack a specific location. While primarily connected to spatial concepts, these heterotopic spaces, as argued by Hetherington, can be both "textual sites as much as geographical ones" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 43). They are often linked to specific time periods, termed by Foucault as "heterochronies" (Foucault, 1986, p. 26). Notably, heterotopias are "sites which rupture the order of things through their different mode of ordering to that which surrounds them ..." (Hetherington, 1997, p. 46). They introduce disparity and upheaval. When applying the concept of heterotopia, or "heterotopology" in Foucault's terms (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), to postcolonial analysis, more intricate intertextual associations emerge. Foucault suggests that a heterotopic place, or "counter-site" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), aims to unsettle and disturb the place it is juxtaposed with. Similarly, postcolonial theory seeks to unsettle, displace, and marginalize the remnants of colonial ideologies and practices across both time and space.

Foucault's theory of heterotopia (Foucault, 1986, p. 24) can be effectively applied to offer a new understanding of Michael Ondaatje's novel "Anil's Ghost" in the context of both postcolonial distinctions in time and space and the isolation of postcolonial trauma within trauma theory. However, the key concept tying together Ondaatje's and Foucault's ideas is the notion of "*relations of propinquity*" (Foucault, 1986, p. 23), seamlessly aligning with the philosophical foundations that permeate Ondaatje's creative work. "*Relations of propinquity*" refer to connections, associations, or relationships marked by proximity, immediate closeness, or physical nearness. This term is commonly used to depict the ties between individuals, groups, or entities situated in close physical or geographical proximity, suggesting a feeling of closeness or nearness in location, space, or relationships.

In "Anil's Ghost," the relations of propinquity traced from the beginning to the end are intertwined with the impact of postcolonial trauma. Foucault describes heterotopias as "varied forms" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), a characterization that fittingly aligns with the personal and cultural trauma's individual outcomes depicted in Michael Ondaatje's novel. Foucault argues that the colony represents one of the "extreme types of heterotopia" (Foucault, 1986, p. 27), which could be perceived as an "illusion" or a form of "compensation". Although colonizers might perceive it this way, those inhabiting the harsh realities of postcolonial spaces have no space for illusions or compensatory measures.

In the novel "Anil's Ghost," the portrayal of scientific knowledge reflects its role as a tool of authority in Western nations, used to favour Western truths while disregarding local postcolonial knowledge. Consequently, Western power often dictates the definition of truth, as prevailing discourses take precedence over local claims. Foucault was particularly intrigued by the interconnectedness of language, or more specifically, discourse (the way of discussing things), knowledge, and power. He extensively delved into these concepts in the 1960s through influential works like "*Madness and Civilization*" (1961), "*The Order of Things*" (1966), and "*The Archaeology of Knowledge*" (1969). He concluded that there are no fundamental principles to unveil the truth, and all knowledge is "local" to the one who knows it and the ideas forming the basis of the postmodern principle of comprehension. Foucault did not dispute the existence of reality but questioned humanity's capacity to overcome cultural biases sufficiently to reach it.

### **3. Methodology.**

The object of this study is the fictional work "*Anil's Ghost*" (2000) by M. Ondaatje, which portrays trauma stemming from dislocation and displacement and the influence of history on both individuals and society, impacting their sense of identity. Trauma theory explores how traumatic experiences create psychological heterotopias – spaces within the mind that deviate from the norm. Heterotopic spaces in the novel, existing outside the conventional norms or structures of society, symbolize locales of marginalization, exile, and conflict. The main objective of this research is to establish a novel connection between trauma theory, heterotopia and postcolonialism, dismantle power structures, challenge Western narratives of the East, and underscore the differing perceptions of truth between the East and West. Analyzing the concept of heterotopic space in "Anil's Ghost" requires a comprehensive approach that integrates cultural studies, trauma theory, and literary analysis. This involves employing a postcolonial perspective to grasp how these spaces mirror the influence of colonial history on characters and their environment,

examining the manifestation of colonial legacy within these spaces. Additionally, applying trauma theory entails scrutinizing characters' responses to traumatic events and the contribution of traumatic experience to the construction of memory and identity, while literary analysis involves identifying physical spaces that exist on the margins of societal norms and represent realms of death, suffering, or cultural conflict. Literary trauma studies offer a multidimensional perspective, not only analyzing how trauma is depicted but also considering the broader implications for both literature and society's understanding of trauma and its aftermath. D. LaCapra emphasizes the importance of historical context in understanding trauma and its representation in literature. Consequently, the research investigates how traumatic events are shaped by historical forces and how they, in turn, shape cultural memory and narratives. By employing these methods, we conduct a comprehensive analysis of the theme of heterotopic space in "Anil's Ghost," considering its literary, cultural identity, and trauma-related dimensions.

#### 4. Results and Discussions

In "Anil's Ghost," Michael Ondaatje crafts a complex interplay between time and space, employing a non-linear narrative structure that intricately weaves together past and present, creating a multidimensional portrayal of both physical and emotional landscapes. Ondaatje's narrative fluidly shifts between different time periods, blurring the boundaries between past and present. This fluidity reflects the characters' fragmented memories and the non-linear nature of trauma. Flashbacks, memories, and present-day events intermingle, creating a mosaic of temporal layers. The novel's exploration of archaeology and the excavation of ancient remains introduces a sense of deep time. The ancient artefacts and skeletal remains evoke a temporal continuum, juxtaposing the immediacy of the characters' traumas with the enduring history of the land.

Throughout its history, Sri Lanka has been subjected to colonization by Portugal, the Netherlands, and Britain, leading to a complex backdrop of ethnic conflicts that predated and were exacerbated by colonial rule. The post-colonial era in Sri Lanka witnessed escalating tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils, culminating in a prolonged period of ethnic violence during the 1980s and early 1990s, setting the stage for the events depicted in Ondaatje's novel. This setting serves as more than a mere backdrop; it mirrors the characters' internal states and the far-reaching effects of trauma across borders. The landscape of Sri Lanka, ravaged by civil war, represents a heterotopic space. It is a site where violence, trauma, and unrest have disrupted the ordinary fabric of society. The scars of war exist in the physical environment, reflecting the deeper emotional and psychological wounds inflicted on individuals and communities.

Anil Tissera, born in Sri Lanka, embodies an intriguing example of a hybrid identity. Despite almost not speaking Sinhala, her family's language, she possesses some understanding of Tamil thanks to her close connection with her nanny, Lalitha. Anil left her homeland fifteen years ago at the age of eighteen and returns not as a member of the diaspora reconnecting with family or friends but as a Western outsider who can no longer freely converse in her childhood language. Her transnational and hybrid status becomes evident in the narrative, evoking a sense of displacement and homelessness. For instance, when questioned about her origins by her American lover Cullis, Anil responds awkwardly, stating, "I live here... In the West" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 22). Her worldview is significantly influenced by Western education, a passion for Western literature, and adherence to a positivist philosophy. Sri Lanka holds only peripheral emotional significance for her, and her perspective on the world is shaped by Western epistemological concepts and a Western lifestyle. As a scientist, she employs systematic thinking and categorizes the world, placing faith in an objective truth substantiated by bodies, bones, and scientific data.

Anil, fascinated by Western culture, can not comprehend the trauma from a post-colonial standpoint. Her deep entrenchment in an epistemological and ontological framework restricts her capacity to empathize with the experiences of post-colonial individuals in Sri Lanka. In various ways, she inadvertently contributes to what Ondaatje criticizes as the "false empathy and blame" of the West (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 26). It's crucial to recognize that Anil is not indifferent; her role as a forensic anthropologist holds significant importance for her. However, prolonged exposure to the suffering of those seeking their missing relatives has resulted in a degree of emotional detachment, a common coping mechanism for forensic professionals in conflict areas. While Anil has personally faced trauma, notably in Guatemala, Congo, and other developed nations, she remains culturally distant from the specific cultural trauma of Sri Lanka. Key quotes from the text underscore the idea that Anil is entirely alienated, as "Anil had courted foreignness" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 32) and she is "the visitor to the country" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 84).

In Foucault's view, every country can be seen as a "heterotopia" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), but the key lies in how they are interpreted. Heterotopia, initially a term in medicine, denotes the displacement of an organ from its regular position in the body, highlighting body parts that exist outside their expected location, either missing, additional, or distinctly "other" within the context of the entire organism. In Hetherington's words, "heterotopia" refers to the shift of an organ from its normal position, suggesting that "parts of the body that are either out of place, missing, extra" or "other" (Hetherington, 1997, p. 42). However, such a medical explanation may not be entirely applicable when trying to comprehend the traumatic aftermath of war. This could be why Anil doesn't immediately grasp the cause of death for another body she is tasked to investigate upon her arrival in Sri Lanka, given that this death resulted from a traumatic heterotopic experience.

According to Foucault, heterotopic death is a postcolonial trauma that can acquire new meaning in the process of "its history unfolds" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). Foucault writes that "each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). However, the critical elements are the shifts in time and space within history and the cultural frameworks used to interpret it. Every heterotopia's function and meaning can evolve based on the "synchrony of the culture in which it occurs" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). Foucault gives the example of the cemetery as a heterotopia, a "strange heterotopia of the cemetery... a space unlike ordinary cultural spaces" (Foucault, 1986, p. 25), which is particularly linked to themes of death and trauma. Historically, in Europe, cemeteries were originally situated within the consecrated space of churches until the late 18th century. However, during the 19th century, cemeteries were relocated beyond urban boundaries. Consequently, the cemetery lost its sacred and eternal character within the city centre, transforming into "the other city" where each family had its designated resting place (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). Nevertheless, compared to Western families with personalized tranquil plots in cemeteries, such a setup remained unattainable for postcolonial territories in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

In the initial chapters of "Anil's Ghost," Ondaatje vividly illustrates the profound impact of trauma through the inescapable presence of death. The Guatemalan field described by the author is a place saturated with a "double-edged fear" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 5). However, the apprehension felt by the Guatemalans assembling for excavations, patiently anticipating the revelation of unidentified corpses, is not tied to the prospect of renewed warfare in their surroundings. Their unspoken anxiety stems from the possibility that the bodies being uncovered by Western forensic experts might be those of "their son in the pit" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 5) or, even more distressingly, that their son's remains might remain undiscovered. This would signify an ongoing, likely unresolved search for closure.

In this heterotopic space of postcolonial interment, Anil and her colleagues frequently encounter a woman who has experienced the loss of both her husband and brother. On one occasion, they discover her seated in the exposed area of the excavations, serving as a shared unnamed burial site. She sits with her legs drawn up under her, almost as if engaged in a formal prayer. Anil struggles to find words that could capture the essence of the woman's face, even for her own understanding. Yet, the woman's grief, born out of love, is indelibly etched in Anil's memory. The woman, unable to provide a proper burial for the deceased, lacks space for the tranquillity of her trauma. Mute in expressing her agony, she quietly undergoes the sorrow and its enduring traumatic repercussions.

It's vital to emphasize that the scene depicting postcolonial trauma at the beginning of the novel "Anil's Ghost" does not unfold in Sri Lanka, serving as a reflection of a distinct form of Western intervention in another country's development and governance. Much like Sri Lanka, Guatemala underwent colonization, but in 1954, the United States discreetly backed a military coup that ousted Guatemala's democratically elected government after over a century of independence from Spain. This resulted in a thirty-five-year-long civil war marked by numerous human rights abuses, claiming the lives of 200,000 individuals. Many of these casualties occurred in massacres, resembling those described at the novel's outset. Beyond the harrowing experiences of wartime killings, both Guatemala and Sri Lanka also share a common form of postcolonial trauma – civilian trauma. The landscape and atmosphere of Guatemala symbolize the aftermath of conflict and the scars left by war. It becomes a canvas upon which the characters confront the trauma of violence, displacement, and loss, contributing to the novel's exploration of the psychological and emotional impacts of conflict.

Over the last four decades, Guatemala has witnessed the forced disappearance of more individuals than any other country in Latin America. Since 1960, there have been approximately 45,000 reported cases of disappearances in a nation with a current population of ten million, and the majority of these victims "vanished" from rural communities (BBC Online, 2007). Following Iraq, Sri Lanka holds the second-highest statistic for disappeared individuals globally. According to a UN study released in 2006, over the past twenty-five years, more than 55,000 people have disappeared, presumed to have been killed (BBC Online, 1999). "The country existed in a rocking, self-burying motion. The disappearances of schoolboys, the death of lawyers by torture, the abduction of bodies from the Hokandara mass graves," Ondaatje observes (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 94): "those who were slammed and stained by violence lost the power of language and logic. It was the way to abandon emotion, a last protection for the self (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 33)".

Set against the backdrop of Sri Lanka's civil war, the novel explores the collective trauma experienced by the nation. Ondaatje highlights the societal upheaval, political turmoil, and the intergenerational impact of violence and conflict on the country's identity. Trauma, especially in the context of war and violence depicted in the novel, creates its own unique spaces. The landscapes scarred by war become heterotopic in their altered, distorted state, challenging traditional notions of serene environments. The excavation sites and archaeological digs, central to the narrative, can be seen as heterotopic spaces. They exist on the border between past and present, reality and imagination, unveiling layers of history that disrupt linear notions of time and space. These spaces mirror the characters' quest for truth and their attempts to unearth buried histories, often tied to traumatic events.

To overcome trauma and navigate through grief, one must pay tribute to the bodies of the deceased and seek meaning. The novel subtly explores the possibility of healing amidst trauma. Anil's quest for truth and justice through her forensic work can be seen as a form of seeking resolution and healing. Anil has embraced the belief that finding purpose aids in finding a path to overcome sorrow and fear. In the novel "Anil's Ghost," the multitude of deaths and appalling violence becomes especially agonizing due to the vast emptiness left behind following the disappearance of loved ones. As highlighted in the prologue of the novel set in Guatemala, Michael Ondaatje, the author, continues to echo the trauma linked to unidentified casualties – deaths unaccompanied by any narratives but encrypted in perpetual silence. Guatemala serves as a significant location in Anil's forensic investigation into war crimes. Guatemala's tumultuous history and its physical landscapes become integral to her quest for truth and justice as she navigates through sites of violence and attempts to unravel the secrets buried within the country's past. It remains unclear how, when, or even why these deaths occurred, or if they occurred at all. However, as an outsider in her own country, Anil lacks a personal connection to the local trauma. She interprets postcolonial trauma through the prism of "the darkest Greek tragedies [which, in her view,] were innocent compared with what was happening here" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 7). Being a student at the university, Anil translated verses from the works of the classical Greek poet Archilochus, renowned for his satirical compositions. Upon arriving in Sri Lanka, she draws parallels between his portrayal of Greek war and the ongoing postcolonial civil war she is currently investigating: "In the hospitality of war we left them their dead to remember us by [Archilochus wrote]. But here was no such gesture to their families of dead, not even the information of who the enemy was" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 7).

In part, the ongoing situation during the war elucidates Anil's persistent efforts to assign a name to the Sailor's skeleton, a symbolic representation of the "murdered, anonymous" in the present-day conflict (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 31). Discovered on a sacred historical site, the Sailor's remains were reinterred in a cemetery designated for the "not prehistoric" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 30). For Anil, this body and its narrative of death are not merely "traced" but also function as a "spokesperson for all those forgotten voices" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 52). By giving him a name, she believes she definitely "would name the rest" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 33). Although her intentions are sincere, her approach is distant due to her Western education and perspective. Engaged in her endeavours to locate and name the Sailor and uncover his forgotten history, Anil operates within a heterotopian space – on a liner resembling Foucault's concept of a cemetery, essentially repurposed as an improvised mortuary. This ship, once named the *Oronsay*, previously served as a floating colony but now lies moored at an abandoned dock. Collaborating with Sarath, a fellow anthropologist and forensic specialist, Anil transforms this vessel into a makeshift centre for performing unauthorized autopsies, utilizing it as both storage and a workspace for the Road Hospital: "scurrying of rats" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 12).

The ship *Oronsay*, in its altered function and its inhabitants' interactions, symbolizes a heterotopic space, challenging the conventional order and allowing for the exploration of multifaceted experiences, identities, and histories. The convergence of these different people on the *Oronsay* creates a unique space that defies conventional societal structures and norms. It becomes a microcosm reflecting the complexities of the larger society, where diverse perspectives, traumas, and histories coexist. Holding onto her naive belief that uncovering the secret of one murder victim will halt further killings, Anil faces the ironic reality of the ship's deterioration and its challenging accessibility. To gain entry into its inner space, Anil must ascend the "Reclamation Street" gangplank (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 12). This juxtaposition highlights the discrepancy between her hopeful aspirations to stop continued fatalities and the harsh reality of the ship's decay, reflecting the obstacles she faces in her pursuit.

Anil's swift actions and unwavering trust in Western science often lead her to act without considering the perspectives of those marginalized by the West. Her scepticism toward Sarath stems from their differing views on truth, with Anil emphasizing an unambiguous, evidence-based understanding: "I don't really know, you see, which side you are on – if I can trust you" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 31). Anil firmly believes that diligent pursuit of answers will eventually reveal the truth, as seen in her forensic examinations: "Truth comes finally into the light" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 149), reflecting her conviction in transparency. However, Sarath, drawing from local experience, understands the complex and perilous history of truth in postcolonial Sri Lanka: "Sarath knew that for her the journey was in getting to the truth. But what would the truth bring them into?" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 93). "As an archaeologist, Sarath believed in truth as a principle. That is, he would have given his life for the truth were of any use" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 93). Both Anil and Sarath are deeply affected by their traumatic pasts. Anil's work as a forensic anthropologist investigating war crimes becomes a means of confronting and understanding trauma. Sarath's silence and withdrawal suggest the emotional toll of his experiences. Their complex psychologies reflect the enduring impact of trauma on individuals. The trauma they endure leaves indelible marks on both the physical and emotional spaces.

After uncovering a series of intricate events tied to the truth about the Sailor's body and its aftermath, Anil discovers a covertly embedded tape recorder nestled between his ribs. When she presses the button intended to release the ethereal voice, she hears the soft-spoken voice of the late Sarath emanating from the lifeless body of the Sailor. The posthumous voice of Sarath, echoing from the emptiness of another who also met their end due to trauma, transforms into a spectral whisper that lingers with Anil. Now, she finds herself "listening to everything again" (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 164), which will evolve into a haunting, traumatic memory tucked away in her own amygdala.



In the concluding chapter of "Anil's Ghost," Ondaatje brings the narrative to a close with a scene that leaves an indelible impression, much like the opening scenes in Guatemala. Whether at the outset or the culmination, the author vividly depicts the personal struggles resulting from human traumas in the heterotopic landscapes known as the "killing field or a burial ground" in Third World countries (Ondaatje, 2000, p. 172). Both scenes are set in impoverished regions marked by desperation and poverty, and in each instance, there is a poignant representation of profound physical trauma. The inhabitants of Sri Lanka participate in a ceremonial ritual where they paint the eyes of statues, an ancient practice symbolizing the animation of lifeless figures. In the course of this ritual, Sarath's nephew places his hand on the shoulder of Ananda, a man who lost his wife, Sirissa, three years ago, symbolizing a connection that transcends generations and conveys a sense of healing and continuity. The chapter transcends generations and conveys a sense of healing and continuity. The chapter concludes with Ananda gazing into the eyes of the statue, seeing his own reflection, and discerning his place in the world. This moment signifies Ananda's inner peace and transformation, becoming a bridge connecting Sri Lanka's past, present, and future.

## **5. Conclusion.**

In his novel "The Ghost of Anil", Ondaatje skillfully recreates the cultural and historical realities of the postcolonial era. Implementation of identity studies and trauma theory reveals the deep connections between the personal identity of the characters and the historical events taking place in their world. The novel also expresses the idea of an inextricable relationship between space and identity, trauma, and memory. Ondaatje creates a literary space in which the geographical environment and its historical context influence the formation of the characters' identities and their perception of reality. Through an examination of heterotopic spaces, such as mass graves and forensic work environments, the novel underscores the profound ways in which physical and metaphorical spaces intersect with personal and collective experiences of suffering and resilience. Additionally, Ondaatje's depiction of hybrid identities and portrayal of postcolonial spaces as heterotopic in his novel "Anil's Ghost" offers fertile ground for future research. This study invites further exploration into the complexities of trauma, memory, and identity in postcolonial contexts and underscores the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and recovering silenced histories. Furthermore, the theme of war and its traumatic aftermath depicted in the novel provides an opportunity for interdisciplinary inquiry into the psychological, social, and cultural impacts of conflict. By examining the characters' coping mechanisms, intergenerational transmission of trauma, and societal responses to collective memory and healing, researchers can contribute to broader conversations about the complexities of the human experience and the challenges of navigating a rapidly changing world. Understanding the novel's reception among diverse audiences and its socio-political context in Sri Lanka demands extensive contextual research and engagement with reader perspectives. Ethical considerations, interdisciplinary integration, understanding of readers' reception, and contextual understanding can further extend the study. Investigating how diverse audiences interpret the novel and grasping its socio-political context in Sri Lanka demand more extensive research. Despite these challenges, this study nevertheless opens more specific opportunities for further effective resolution of its limitations.

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